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Rules of the Game
All About Illusions (Part Four)
By Skip Williams

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Last week, we explored what it means to interact with an illusion and we also considered a few instances where interacting with an illusion isn't strictly necessary to disbelieve the illusion. This week, we'll wrap up our study of illusions with a few odds and ends related to the topic.

Using Figments Well

As noted in Part One, spellcasters often make the mistake of trying to use figment spells (such as *silent image, minor image,* and *major image*) to make something look like something else. Figment spells don't do that -- you need a glamer spell for the task. You can craft a figment to fit in with its surroundings or to conceal something. Consider these situations:

- A party wishes to hide in a dungeon room just beyond an archway.

You cannot use a figment to make the archway look like an unbroken wall. You can, however, use a figment to make the archway look like it has been bricked up; the edges of the bricked area will conform to the archway. You also could use a figment to create an illusory door that fills the doorway. You could even include hinges for the door (set atop the frame of the arch) and a big lock.

- You wish to draw some bad guys into an ambush by creating a false oasis in the desert.

You cannot use a figment to make empty sand look like an oasis. You still can create an illusory oasis with one or more figment effects. You can create an illusory pool of water to fill a depression in the sand, and you can sprinkle the area with illusory palm trees and undergrowth.

If the area is very flat, you won't be able to create a believable figment pool of water, but you might get away with a spring where water bubbles to the surface and soaks back into the sand.

- A party caught in the open wants to hide from an airborne foe.

A figment can't make the party look like they aren't there. It can, however, make them a place to hide. You could use a figment spell to make an illusory house, a grove of trees (with leafy branches for concealment), or even a hill or big rock. The party will be concealed so long as the characters stay underneath the illusion.

A Few Additional Notes on Figments

The foregoing examples also serve to illustrate concepts from Parts Two and Three:

Characters hiding behind or under the illusions here need to make saving throws to successfully disbelieve them (assuming they want to do so). The caster, however, knows the illusions aren't real. If the caster points out the illusions, the characters get a +4 bonus on their saves; in this case, the DM might want to waive the saving throws and assume disbelief to save time.

In any case, a successful saving throw against a figment spell reveals the figment to be unreal, but still visible (if it's a visible figment) as a see-through outline. This is helpful to characters using a figment for concealment because they can see right through the figment and also know exactly where the figment is so that they can remain concealed.

In many cases, creatures who are unaware that illusion magic is at work probably will not gain saving throws to disbelieve the figments in these examples. A creature in the vicinity of one of these figments probably would pass right by without taking any action to study or interact with the figment and gain a saving throw. This, however, applies only to creatures passing casually though the area. A creature that is deliberately searching for the party that the figments in these examples conceal probably will poke around long enough to gain a saving throw through study or interaction (or might simply stumble through the figment). Likewise, a creature that is very familiar with the locale where the figments have been placed probably will note the sudden appearance of a new feature and gain an immediate saving throw (because doors, oases, and hills don't just spring up in a matter of minutes or hours usually).

Illusions and Mindless Creatures

Unraveling an illusion is partly a matter of intellect, but mostly a matter of analysis and perception. Any creature can attempt to disbelieve an illusion because every creature has a Wisdom score. A mindless creature, however, is much less likely to find something just plainly unbelievable (and thus gain a saving throw to disbelieve with no study or interaction) than a creature with an Intelligence score would be. A mindless creature lacks an internal catalog of memories and expectations that can generate the level of incredulity required to evoke instant disbelief.

Illusions and Objects

Objects have no senses and no Wisdom scores. They cannot disbelieve an illusion, but they can't perceive it either.

Shadows are a special case. A shadow is partly real and can affect an object just as anything real can. Shadow spells that have a reduced effect when disbelieved generally have reduced effects against objects because objects can't believe them. Check the description of the shadow spell in question to be sure. For example, objects automatically are assumed to make their saving throws against the various shadow conjuration and shadow evocation spells presented in the *Player's Handbook.* In other cases, follow the rules for object saving throws against spells (in most cases an unattended, nonmagical object doesn't get a saving throw against a spell).

More Fun With Shadows

In most cases, what applies to a figment spell also applies to a shadow spell, with one important exception: A shadow is partially real. A shadow can have real effects, even when a subject disbelieves the shadow.

A shadow's quasi-real nature can pose some problems in play. Here are a few tips and reminders for handling shadows:

- A shadow is only partially real whether a subject believes it is real or not. A shadow's degree of reality is expressed as a percentage given in the spell description. For example, a creature conjured with a *shadow conjuration* spell is only 20% real.

Certain aspects of a shadow always depend on its degree of reality. These aspects include hit points.

Other aspects of a shadow remain fixed, no matter what its degree of reality. These include gross dimensions (height, width, thickness), superficial details (color, shape, anatomical features), attack bonus (but see below), saving throw bonuses, skill scores, and ability scores. For example, a shadow ogre mage (page 200 in the *Monster Manual*) that is 20% real has 5 Hit Dice, but only 7 hit points (20% of 37, rounded down to the nearest whole number). Its initiative and speed ratings are unchanged. Its Armor Class depends on whether its attacker believes it is real. The rest of the monster's statistics are unchanged, though some of its combat results will be reduced against foes who have successfully disbelieved it.

- When a creature believes a shadow is real, the shadow interacts with that creature exactly like the real creature or object it depicts, except as noted previously.

A shadow creature strikes in combat for full damage if the other creature believes it is real. It likewise has its full Armor Class bonus if the creature attacking it believes it is real. Nevertheless, the shadow has only part of its real counterpart's hit points.

When a creature successfully disbelieves a shadow, the shadow has a partially real effect when interacting with that creature.

When dealing with a partially real effect from a shadow, first attempt to reduce the effect according to the shadow's degree of reality. If the aspect can be expressed as a number, you simply reduce it accordingly. Be sure, however, that you apply the reduction only once to any particular number. For instance the shadow ogre mage from the previous example normally strikes with its greatsword for 3d6+7 points of damage. Against a foe who has successfully disbelieved it, the shadow ogre mage uses its normal attack bonus of +7, but deals only 20% of its usual damage with a successful hit. Roll damage normally, but apply only 20% of the resulting damage. For example, the shadow ogre mage hits and rolls 3d6+7 points of damage for a total of 19 points. It deals only 3 points (20% of 19, rounded down to the nearest whole number). When the disbelieving foe attacks the shadow ogre mage, its Armor Class is calculated as follows: base 10 (unchanged), -1 size (unchanged), +1 additional bonus (+5 natural, +4 chain shirt; that is an unadjusted total +9; 20% of that is 1.8, rounded down to the nearest whole number). The disbelieving foe has to contend with AC 11, touch 9, flat-footed 11. If the shadow ogre mage had a Dexterity bonus, that, too, would be added into the pool of AC bonuses that would be

reduced.

The shadow ogre mage still occupies 10 feet of space on the battlefield, and it has a reach of 10 feet. It conducts combat as a Large creature.

You might wonder why the size modifier wasn't altered for the shadow ogre mage's Armor Class. The shadow ogre mage is still tall and broad enough to present a big target, so size still has its full effect (as it would if the shadow combatant were small enough to gain an Armor Class bonus).

Being only part real cannot make a creature a more capable foe. Do not reduce Dexterity penalties when calculating a shadow's Armor Class.

The shadow ogre mage has its full suite of spell-like abilities. Its damage-dealing ability, *cone of cold,* works normally against a disbeliever, except that the damage dealt is only 20% of normal. Its other abilities (*darkness, invisibility, charm person,* flight, and regeneration) aren't so easy to handle. I recommend that any ability that affects only the shadow creature work normally (in this case, *invisibility ,* flight, and regeneration). Powers that can affect others or the creature's surroundings (*darkness* and *charm person*) have only a 20% chance to work when theshadow ogre mage uses them. Roll percentile dice, and on a roll of 81 or higher, the power in question has its full effect. Otherwise, it has no effects at all.

You can use this method to deal with any ability a shadow creature has. First look to a numerical damage value or AC bonus you can reduce. If there is none, roll to determine if the ability takes effect.

In Conclusion

That wraps up our discussion of illusions. Remember that seeing isn't always believing in the **D&D** game.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon* Magazine for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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